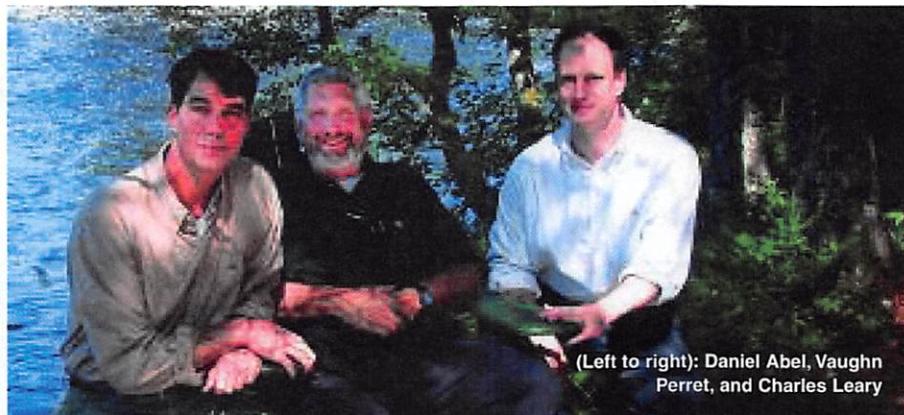


EXHIBIT 8

Three friends from New Orleans followed the roots of Cajun and Creole cuisine to Nova Scotia. They settled on a scenic spot at the convergence of the Tusket and Napier Rivers, not too far from where North America's first culinary society, the Order of Good Cheer, was founded at Port Royal in 1606

New world Creole

by MARILYN SMULDERS
photos by WAYNE BARRETT



(Left to right): Daniel Abel, Vaughn Perret, and Charles Leary



There are 10 of us getting acquainted around a rough-hewn banquet table set with fine linen: couples from Bangor; New York City; Boston; Middleton in the Annapolis Valley; and my 12-year-old son, Conor McLaughlin, and I from Halifax. All eyes are on Conor, he of the chicken finger and fries diet, as Charles Leary, one of the proprietors of Trout Point Lodge, a cooking school and resort located deep in the Nova Scotia wilderness, brings out the first course: cabbage and new potato soup. It's hearty unpretentious fare, and, after a day of hiking, kayaking, swimming, and doing cannonballs in the hot tub, Conor digs in with

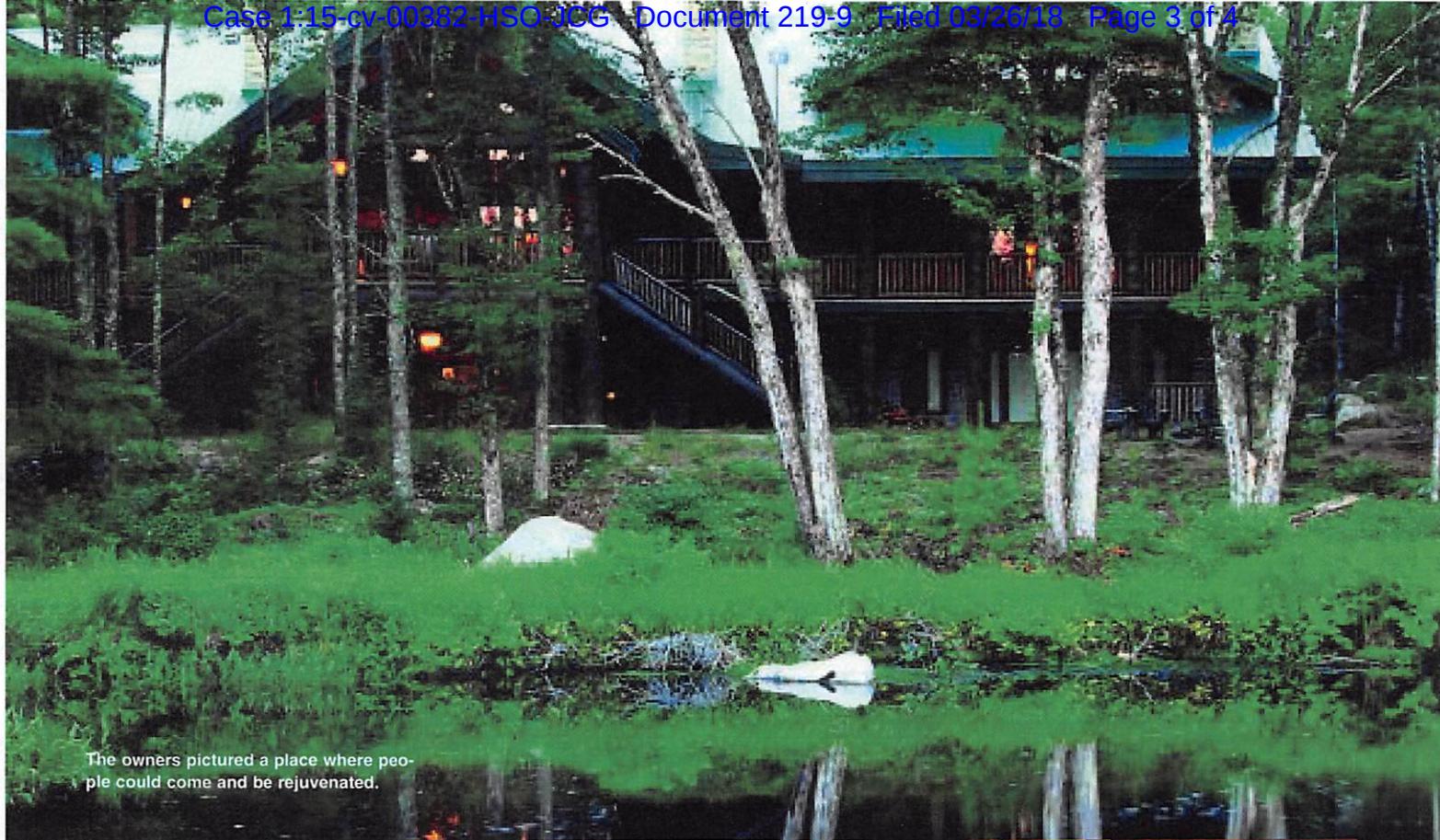
gusto. (A stern look from yours truly stops him from licking the bowl.)

Next comes a mixed salad with greens plucked from the garden, grilled oyster mushrooms, and piquant, oil-cured, manchego cheese brought back from Spain. The main course is shrimp etouffée. The Louisiana classic usually is made with crawdads, but today shrimp substitutes, and it's served with a cream sauce over rice.

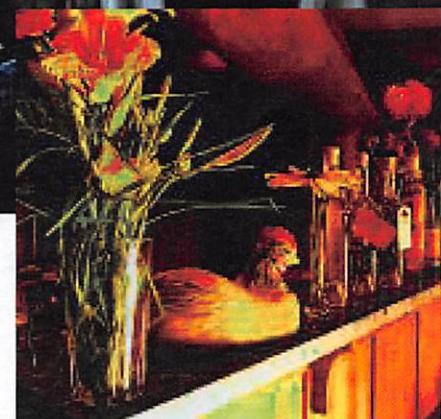
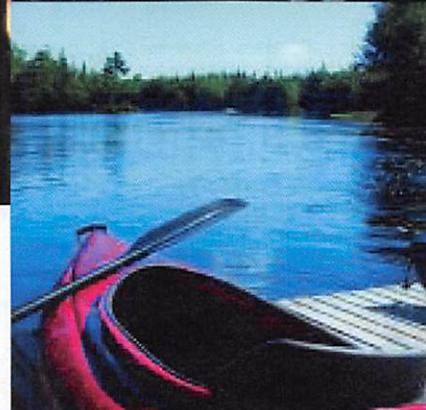
All of us are here for one thing: the food. We've followed our noses down Yarmouth County's winding back roads to Trout Point Lodge. It's why Leary, Vaughn Perret, and Daniel Abel switched paths from their professional careers as

lawyers and professors to establish the lodge—to pursue their love of all things culinary. "We look to see what's in the garden or in the woods, or else we'll call the seafood wholesaler to see what's coming in fresh," says Leary, a one-time Chinese-history professor turned cheese-maker, baker, and chef, explaining how today's menu was chosen. Then he delivers the bad news: There's only one crème brûlée left. Other dessert choices include silky banana chocolate pie and vanilla ice cream with fresh blackberries.

From New Orleans, the three friends dug down to the roots of Cajun and Creole cuisine and found themselves in Nova Scotia, which was settled by the



The owners pictured a place where people could come and be rejuvenated.



Acadians in the early 17th century. Expelled by the British 250 years ago, the Acadians scattered across the globe, some looping back to Nova Scotia, some back to France, and others to Louisiana, where they became known as Cajuns.

Carved out of a heavily forested area located on the fringe of the Tobeatic Wilderness Preserve in southwestern Nova Scotia just six years ago, Trout Point Lodge isn't too far from where North America's first culinary society, the Order of Good Cheer, was founded at Port Royal, near Annapolis Royal, in 1606. "We followed the Acadian connection from Louisiana," says Perret. "Once we got here, we fell in love with the place. We found so much

potential. It was peaceful; tranquil. We pictured a place where people could come and be rejuvenated."

The business partners considered a few different locations in Nova Scotia before settling on this scenic spot at the convergence of the Tusket and Napier Rivers. Their decision was supported by the Nova Scotia government's move in 1998 to protect from development the Tobeatic, which is regarded as Nova Scotia's last true wilderness area.

Hewn from New Brunswick Eastern spruce logs that are so big I can barely link my arms around them, the three-storey lodge is designed to bring in the great outdoors, with its numerous breezeways,

patios, and porches. Front doors open to a warm summer breeze, and the Tusket River out back is visible from the entrance. Open year-round, the lodge has 14 guest rooms, a lounge with comfy chesterfields and chairs arranged around a hand-cut granite fireplace, a library, dining room, and kitchen. The rustic interior is furnished with log-and-twigs furniture designed by the owners and made by Acadian craftsmen in nearby Wedgeport.

The twig bed in my suite could pass for Father Bear's in *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*. It's stacked high, with two mattresses on top of a box spring, and I could use a ladder to climb into it. There are lots of books scattered around the

room—guests are encouraged to use the library—but there's no television or telephone. At night the rushing water of the river soothes me to sleep.

It might not be paradise, but it's close—thanks to the vision and hard work of the owners, who are proud of their hands-on involvement. "We designed the building and the furniture and we do all the cooking," says Leary. "We try to do everything." Says Perret, who used to practice law at a Park Avenue firm in Manhattan: "Life here is quiet. There's the wind in the trees, the river flowing by, walks in the woods. When you're here, it's hard to imagine being anywhere else."

The men's philosophy about cooking and life are explored in *The Trout Point Lodge Cookbook*, which was published recently by Random House Canada. Recipes such as jambalaya, cashew chili, and lime-grilled cattail root rely on simple and flavourful ingredients prepared in a method the men call new world Creole—a merging of traditional Creole, Cajun, and Acadian food with an emphasis on diverse, healthy, fresh ingredients.

As their model, Perret recalls the "order of good cheer" of his childhood at his grandparents' house in New Orleans. Of French-Creole heritage, they had a veritable farm within the city, where they tended a greenhouse, garden, and goats, sheep, and chickens; milled their own corn; and made their own cheese. At suppertime the family would gather around a table under magnolia trees laden with homemade food. "Those enormous banquets lasted all day," says Perret. "And boy, did the food ever taste good."

At the lodge, many of the ingredients that are used in the meals are grown in the garden, foraged in woods, or caught fresh out of the rivers. There's also a smokehouse to cure the salmon, tuna, swordfish, scallops, and haddock bought on the docks in Yarmouth. Made of weathered grey boards, the tall narrow building resembles an out-house and looks right at home in the woods.

From the start, the trio envisioned a place where people could come not only to relax and dine but also to learn about food. Trout Point Lodge offers culinary vacations—three-day, two-night programs that

include accommodations, cooking lessons, and a field trip. The excursion might be to Chebogue River Marsh to gather mussels, clams, and sea vegetables or to nearby Eel Lake, one of two saltwater lakes in Nova Scotia, to harvest oysters and collect wild ingredients such as Indian cucumbers, cattail shoots, and lotus leaves.

Besides Trout Point Lodge, the trio operates the Inn at Coyote Mountain in Costa Rica and the Granada Cooking School in Spain. They also owned the Chicory Farm Cafe in New Orleans's Uptown district until just two weeks before Hurricane Katrina struck and devastated the Gulf Coast of the United States in August. Since then, Perret's mother and brother have sought refuge at the lodge, and other relatives are expected to arrive in the coming weeks and months.

"Everyone has been wonderful. Everywhere I go in this province, somebody is doing something to help our friends and neighbours in Louisiana," says Abel, whose house in Sidell, La., had its first floor wiped out by the hurricane and the ensuing tidal surge. "People who know me have come by and called and asked what they can do. Every time I go to a public place, there's always someone collecting something for someone. Just the other day, we were in the parking lot at Yarmouth Mall, and some guys with the Lions Club were literally stopping every car [to raise money for hurricane relief]. You couldn't get out of the parking lot until you dropped something into their buckets. I was so touched by the generosity. I know we've settled in a good place."

After a delicious breakfast, Conor and I wave goodbye to the amiable Abel from the back porch of Trout Point Lodge—he's steering a red canoe down the middle of the fast-moving river. "Did you go over the rapids yet?" he calls out over his shoulder, waving a wooden paddle back at us. "You've got to try the rapids." We vow we will—when we come back. ■

TROUT POINT LODGE

Where: Located in East Kemptville, it's accessible from Yarmouth or Shelburne. The drive will take at least 45 minutes from each place. From Halifax, plan on more than three hours of driving.

For more information: Fourteen guest rooms and one cottage are available. Call (902) 749-7629 or e-mail troutpoint@foodyvacation.com.